

NAAFA *Newsletter*

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SIZE DISCRIMINATION SUIT BEGINS IN N. J.

Joseph Gimello, a 270 pound car rental manager from New Jersey, has sued his former employer for size discrimination. Gimello, 43, claims that he was terminated by Agency Rental System solely because of his weight and not due to lack of performance on the job. He sued under a 1972 New Jersey state law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of a real or perceived handicap. The suit, a first in the state of New Jersey, went to trial in the State Division of Civil Rights on Friday, January 22 in Hamilton, N.J.

According to a UPI story reported on WPIX television in New York and in newspapers around the country, Gimello had been employed by the rental company for four years as the manager of the Cherry Hill office. Sales were increasing, his facility had been named the "office of the month" eight times, and Gimello was up for promotion.

But after an in-person interview with top management in 1983, Gimello was fired. He claims that his superiors called him a "fat slob," questioned his ability to "get around at that weight," and said he was "unpromotable".

Testimony continued through January, and a decision is expected in March.

Gimello lives with his wife Ida Mae, and currently works for another car rental firm. His wife told reporters that after the firing, Gimello lost confidence in himself and his appearance.

NAAFA's Executive Director issued a press release in support of Gimello's case; and NAAFA officers have offered personal encouragement to the Gimello family. ♡

[More on this in upcoming issues.—Ed.]

L.A. LAW PUTS SIZE BIGOTRY ON TRIAL

"Webster's dictionary defines prejudice as a preconceived opinion lacking a just foundation. Isn't that exactly how [one could] describe the public's attitude toward the overweight?"

You might expect to see such a quote in the NAAFA Newsletter, or some other size acceptance publication. But these words came from a script of *L.A. Law*. Aired Thursday, February 11 on NBC television, this *L.A. Law* episode featured a storyline about a fat attorney, Lynn Stettler (played [continued page 2]



Photography courtesy of Sandy and Stuart Dawson of New York.

SALLY E. SMITH APPOINTED FIRST EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

"We need an Executive Director. This is the only way NAAFA can achieve the next period of growth and approach the 1990's as a truly influential civil rights organization." These words appeared in an article by Chairman Conrad H. Blickenstorfer in our August 1987 Newsletter.

Sally E. Smith, a NAAFA member from California, read that article and agreed. Sally's professional background has been with non-profit organizations—working in development and administration—and she has a good understanding of NAAFA's needs. And so began a series of letters, phone calls, and meetings with top NAAFA leaders that led to a proposal to appoint her to the executive directorship.

The proposal was passed unanimously at the Board of Director's January 1, 1988 meeting, and Sally E. Smith, was appointed NAAFA's first Executive Director.

[continued page 3]

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L.A. LAW, continued

admirably by Susan Peretz), who was fired from her firm for being obese.

In her quest for vindication and a settlement of "not a penny under \$135,000," she hires Michael Kusak (played by Harry Hamlin) to represent her. As the opposing attorneys presented their cases, almost 30 million viewers across the country were treated to a debate on the nature of fat prejudice.

The defendants claim that, despite the fact that Stettler was a good attorney, her unpopular body size was a detriment to her credibility. The managing partner of the firm testifies, "For an attorney-at-law, performance and appearance are not mutually exclusive. The reality is that people look at her and say, 'Gee, if she can't take care of herself, how can she take care of me?'"

Later the defense attorney asks Stettler, "Isn't it true, ...for your entire life, people have readily dismissed you simply because you are fat?" "The fact that everyone does it, doesn't excuse it," she responds. "No, it doesn't," the attorney rebuts. "But if it's a reality, how can you blame my client for recognizing it..."

But Kusak, representing Stettler, expresses a different view. He maintains that by acknowledging the existence of bigotry and then acting on it, as the firm did when they fired Stettler, the firm actually endorsed prejudice against fat people. "I blame you more [than the public]. The public's opinion is based on ignorance," Kusak argues. "You know her. You know she's a good attorney and yet you fired her anyway."

The viewers were also allowed to see the personal side of Lynn Stettler. During a break in the trial, she shares some of her personal frustrations and pain with Kusak:

"When my friends used to go to dances or cheerleading practice, I went to the library. I studied, and I studied because I was damned determined that I would be the best lawyer that anybody could be. And what the hell did it get me? Fired, for not looking like a cheerleader."

The script writers also let us see Stettler as a powerful, competent person, and not just as a victim: Stettler decides to defend herself for the summation, despite Kusak's advice to the contrary. Her summation is delivered calmly and competently:

"If the defendant's theory is true, it doesn't matter what I say here, because you will have instantly concluded, the moment you saw me, that I was less

equal by mere virtue of my weight. If you subscribe to that notion...you're wrong. And if the whole world agrees with you, the whole world is wrong. Because prejudice cannot be validated by unanimous consent; it can only be made more dangerous.

"I do not accept the defendant's premise that a person's physique is a criteria for respect or friendship; and I do not accept their assertion that people regard physical appearance as an indication of intellectual ability; and I certainly do not accept their assumption that this jury will forgive those that do. The evidence before you is uncontroverted. I am an able, competent attorney who was fired from her job because of their belief that the world hates fat people. That's discrimination..."

"And like it or not, you cannot possibly find for the defendant unless you are prepared right now to condone it. Even if you are, don't think for one second this bigotry has prevailed. Because the next time I am confronted by this prejudice, and there will be a next time, I'll be back. And I'll come back again and again and again, and sooner or later, I'll come across a jury who will not tolerate this blindness. I hope that time is now. But if it's not, the fight's not over, I promise. This fat lady ain't singing yet."

Who wins? The jury finds for the plaintiff and awards Stettler \$210,000. But when the verdict was read, (and even though I knew that this was just television drama), I felt that I had won—and that every fat person in America had won. It is said that art imitates life. But life also imitates art. Millions of people watch L.A. Law. We can hope they all learned something about fat bigotry.

—Nancy Summer ◊

[Note: The Board of Directors has already voted Distinguished Achievement Awards for both Susan Peretz and the writers of the show. More on this in a future issue.—Ed.]

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A MESSAGE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SALLY E. SMITH

I joined NAAFA two years ago, after realizing that it was more important to accept and like myself than to try and conform to society's ideal of thinness.

In my first year as a NAAFAn, I came out of the closet on size acceptance issues and decided that I needed to do something to further NAAFA's goals. After many years of fighting for the rights of others, through my work with the American Civil Liberties Union and the Lobby for Individual Freedom and Equality, it was time to start fighting for my own rights as a fat person.

Initially, I had a hard time finding my niche in NAAFA. Then I read the Newsletter article about NAAFA's need for an Executive Director. I immediately saw an opportunity to combine my professional experience with my dedication to the fat acceptance movement. After much discussion with NAAFA's leadership, I submitted a proposal for the executive directorship. I flew to New York to interview for the position and to present my proposal to the Board.

The Holiday Happening was my first national event in NAAFA. I was impressed, in every way, with the caliber of the people I met. I found NAAFA's leadership to be a group of dynamic, capable individuals dedicated to achieving NAAFA's goals. As I met other NAAFAns I was struck by their warmth and commitment to our purpose. When I walked into the first dance, I felt empowered in knowing that, as fat people and thin allies, NAAFA had brought us together. At the "Town Meeting," I heard concerned members voice their opinions and ideas, and heard the Board respond to those concerns in a compassionate and informative way.

I left New York feeling both exhausted and exhilarated. I knew then that NAAFA's goals were within our reach. We have all the ingredients necessary to achieve our goals: an ambitious agenda, a dedicated membership, and talented leadership. All we need is someone to channel these energies toward focused objectives.

That's where I enter the picture. My responsibilities as Executive Director will be to provide that focus and coordinate the many facets of NAAFA. I will be making recommendations to the Board of Directors regarding such projects as fundraising, membership development and support, and pro-

gram development. I will then see to it that the Board's decisions are implemented.

NAAFA's primary objectives for my first year as Executive Director are to double the membership and to bring in more funds for the operating budget. There are many exciting ideas which, with your help, we will put into action. Right now, I am formulating a five year plan of NAAFA's goals and objectives, which will help in determining the funding, program, and membership needs of the organization. I will be asking for input from NAAFA's leadership, both national and local, from the membership, and from NAAFA's staff in formulating my recommendations.

I invite your comments, ideas and suggestions about NAAFA's future. Please write to me at NAAFA's new executive offices at PO Box 246, Herald, California 95638.

The bottom line is that I work for you, and I need your help to make NAAFA's dream a reality. ∞

IMPORTANT NOTE: NAAFA's Bellerose, New York office will continue to handle all membership correspondence, (except for that specifically for Sally E. Smith.) Please also continue to mail all renewals, donations, and business correspondence to Bellerose, New York.

TRADE PUBLICATION DEBUTS

Plus Sizes, a new trade publication for the large size fashion industry, has just made its debut. Published by Earnshaw Publications, Plus Sizes is a delightfully positive, glossy magazine for plus size manufacturers and retailers, fiber and fabric people, and fashion editors across the country.

During the development stages of Plus Sizes, a number of retailers were asked what they need in a trade publication. Needs included marketing statistics, new resources, information about the plus-sized customer and a desire to see fashions on plus-sized models!

The publisher promises "We will not present...any garment that isn't at least a size 14, and preferably size 18. And we're not forgetting that there are "older" women out there and super sizes, too."

While Plus Sizes is not written for the consumer (all articles are written for retailers and manufacturers), some NAAFAns have expressed a desire to subscribe. A one year subscription is \$15. (Qualified retailers, manufacturers, etc. receive free subscriptions.) For details contact Earnshaw Publications, 225 W. 34th Street, New York, NY 10001. ∞

ACTIVISM ALERT

Jimmy "the Greek" Snyder, a long-time sports commentator for CBS was fired from his job in January for making perceived racist statements on the air. The firing came less than 24 hours after Snyder discussed the differences between white and black players in sports.

Whether you agree with CBS's decision or not, we're sure you can agree that if Mr. Snyder had made fat jokes or sizist comments (instead of racist comments), he would still be working at CBS today. Ask yourself: Are you aware of any commentator, interviewer or entertainer who has ever been fired for making sizist comments or fat jokes? Most likely, your answer is "no."

NAAFA's Activism Committee (Russell F. Williams and Louise Wolfe, Co-Chairs) ask that you write CBS and point out that fact, and ask for the same harsh treatment of people who air fat bigotry in the name of entertainment. Write to:

Mr. Gene F. Jankowski, President
CBS Broadcast Group
51 West 52nd Street
New York, New York 10019

Russell often follows up his official Activism Committee letters with a phone call. He reports that when he called Mr. Jankowski's office at CBS, he was told by a staff member that CBS was aware of his letter and that they knew how many letters had been received mentioning fat issues. Russell encourages all NAAFAns to write: "As long as someone is counting at CBS...let's give them something to count," he says. ∞

CONVENTION UPDATE

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
INNER HARBOR MARRIOTT

Members often ask for convention news to be released as soon as possible, so they can make their plans for attending. Here is the basic schedule for 1988. (While it is not finalized, we do not anticipate any major changes.)

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31

Baltimore sightseeing
National Aquarium trip.
Registration and Orientation, Workshops
Late evening: Pool Party

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 1

Workshops
Special leadership training seminar
(for chapter, SIG, and national leaders)
Luncheon
Early evening: Reception
and Chapter Rally

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 2

Workshops and SIG meetings
Fashion Show luncheon
Shopping time—with merchants and
designers present at our show.
Evening: Dinner buffet and
'50's Dance and Show

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

Workshops and SIG meetings
Awards luncheon with guest speakers
Evening: Dinner Dance

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

Brunch and Town Meeting
Workshops
Late afternoon: Talent Show
Evening: Dinner Cruise
Late evening: Pool Party

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

Workshops and SIG meetings
Farewell luncheon

There is an estimated 35-40 hours of workshop time scheduled during the weekend. If you are interested in presenting a workshop at the convention, it is urgent that you call or write the Convention Steering Committee (in care of the NAAFA office), describing your proposed workshop, your credentials, and your preferred day of presentation. Our schedule is filling quickly.

The Convention Committees anticipate mailing convention materials by May. Room rates will be \$55 per night, and the NAAFA event package will be between \$250 and \$275. ◊◊

MEET NAAFA'S COMMITTEES

"The Committee
on Committees"

by Dan Davis (CA)

Tired of anti-fat media drivel? Fed up with being the butt of discrimination and obnoxious fat jokes? Want a better social life? The answers are obvious. They're the reasons you joined NAAFA in the first place. And NAAFA is doing its best to respond to those issues and more.

But how does a mainly volunteer agency approach such an overwhelming mission? Our officers and directors are as industrious a group as you'll find anywhere, but they also have jobs and families and the limits imposed by a 24 hour day. That's where the NAAFA committees come in.

NAAFA has no less than 38 committees. Some are operating committees with a continuing agenda; some are research committees formed to carry out specific projects; and some are a combination of the two. There are committees on activism, employment, fundraising, health, insurance, and legislation, to name just a few. There is even a "Committee on Committees" to keep track of all the other committees.

Each committee is responsible to the Board of Directors. The Board appoints chairpeople and may appoint other members, as may the chairs themselves. Most Board members are on one or more committees. If you want to run for this Board, it helps to be a workaholic.

The committees must also report at least once every six months. The Committee on Committees is charged with overseeing the running of all the other committees. It keeps track of projects, activities and memberships; and it reports chair vacancies to the Board and recommends new members. Chairing the Committee on Committees is a little like trying to play shepherd to a flock of particularly independent cats. I know. I just took on the job.

In the future I'll tell you more about NAAFA's committees. Many have huge jobs to tackle, and your time, skills and resources could mean the difference between their success and failure. In issues to come, I'll explain how you can help.

[In our next issue, Dan will introduce you to NAAFA's new Marketing and Advertising Committee.] ◊◊

DUES REVISIONS APPROVED

Revisions to NAAFA's dues structure were recently approved by the Board of Directors. Regular, Senior, Student, Limited Income, and Joint classes received nominal changes—mainly on renewals of membership. More substantial changes were made in the Supporting and Benefactor grades in both new applications and renewals.

CLASS	CURRENT DUES	PREVIOUSLY
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REGULAR

New	\$35.00	\$35.00
Renewal	\$35.00	\$30.00

STUDENT and SENIOR

New	\$20.00	\$25.00
Renewal	\$20.00	\$20.00

LIMITED INCOME

New	\$20.00	\$20.00
Renew	\$20.00	\$15.00

SUPPORTING

New	\$100.00	\$55.00
Renew	\$100.00	\$50.00

BENEFACTOR

New	\$250.00	\$100.00
Renewal	\$250.00	\$100.00

JOINT RESIDENT (Per person)

New	\$20.00	\$10.00
Renew	\$20.00	\$10.00

These dues revisions went into effect as of February 13, 1988. All members and chapters who have a supply of the old application forms, are advised to discard them and request a supply of the new forms. ◊◊

ERRATA

Lynn Meletiche's name was omitted from the Editor's list of 1987 contributors to the Newsletter. Lynn contributed a poem about James Coco, and has often submitted copies of activism letters to the NAAFA office. Thanks, Lynn! ◊◊

Articles in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official policies of NAAFA, Inc., unless specifically noted. Please contact the NAAFA office about specific NAAFA policies. Commentaries in this Newsletter, unless otherwise noted, were prepared by a member of the editorial staff. ◊◊